

The

# Common Core Writing Book



Lessons for a Range of Tasks,  
Purposes, and Audiences

**K-5**

# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments*    xiii

**Overview**    xv

**Some Options**    xv

**The Places We Could Go**    xvi

**Organization of the Book**    xvii

**The Types of Instruction**    xix

**DEMONSTRATION**    xx

**COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT**    xx

**INDEPENDENT APPLICATION**    xx

**TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES: Anchor 1 . . . . . 1**

*Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 1*    1

*Decision Tree for Writing Anchor 1*    2

**Demonstration**    3

**OVERARCHING LESSON**    4

**MINILESSONS** . . . . .19

**Generating Meaningful Topics** . . . . .19

**Stating an Opinion** . . . . .19

“Here’s what I thought” . . . . .20

“In my opinion” . . . . .20

Using words to express an opinion . . . . .21

**Outlining Reasons for an Opinion.** . . . .22

**Creating an Organizational Structure** . . . . .23

Use a planning map . . . . .23

Use sticky notes . . . . .23

Use subtitles . . . . .23

**Crafting a Strong Introduction.** . . . .24

Learn from professional authors . . . . .24

Try different opening techniques . . . . .24

**Providing a Sense of Closure** . . . . .25

Learn from professional authors . . . . .26

Try different closure techniques . . . . .26

## **Collaborative Engagement 27**

Analyzing and Evaluating Writing Samples from the Classroom . . . . .	27
Analyzing and Evaluating Mentor Text. . . . .	28
Conferring with the Teacher . . . . .	29
Conferring with Peers . . . . .	30

## **Independent Application 31**

Personal Responses to Literature . . . . .	31
Book Reviews . . . . .	31
Literary Essays . . . . .	32
Persuasive Letters . . . . .	32
Persuasive Essays . . . . .	33
Blogs . . . . .	33
Persuasive Video or Photo Documentaries . . . . .	34
Advertisements . . . . .	34

## **TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES: Anchor 2 . . . . . 36**

<i>Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 2</i>	36
<i>Decision Tree for Writing Anchor 2</i>	37

## **Demonstration 38**

### **OVERARCHING LESSON 38**

<b>MINILESSONS . . . . .</b>	54
<b>Finding a Meaningful Topic. . . . .</b>	54
<b>Organizing and Managing a Piece. . . . .</b>	54
Using assigned categories or headings . . . . .	55
Developing categories . . . . .	55
Using a planning map . . . . .	55
Sharpening the focus . . . . .	56
<b>Developing the Content . . . . .</b>	56
Elaboration . . . . .	57
Stretching a statement . . . . .	57
Freewriting or freedrawing . . . . .	57
Reading . . . . .	58
<b>Using Illustrations and Other Media . . . . .</b>	58
<b>Crafting a Title . . . . .</b>	59
Rationalizing title preferences . . . . .	59
Practice with titles . . . . .	59
Considering titles across genres . . . . .	59

<b>Crafting a Strong Introduction</b> . . . . .	59
Learn from professional authors . . . . .	60
Try different opening techniques . . . . .	60
<b>Providing a Sense of Closure</b> . . . . .	60
Learn from professional authors . . . . .	60
Try different closure techniques . . . . .	60

## **Collaborative Engagement   64**

<b>Analyzing and Evaluating Writing Samples from the Classroom</b> . . . . .	64
<b>Analyzing and Evaluating Mentor Text</b> . . . . .	65
<b>Conferring with the Teacher</b> . . . . .	65
<b>Conferring with Peers</b> . . . . .	65

## **Independent Application   67**

<b>All-About Books</b> . . . . .	67
<b>How-to Pieces</b> . . . . .	67
<b>Informational Articles</b> . . . . .	67
<b>Research and Lab Reports</b> . . . . .	67
<b>Informational Web Pages</b> . . . . .	68
<b>Oral Presentations</b> . . . . .	68
<b>Informational Documentaries</b> . . . . .	70
Photo documentaries . . . . .	70
Video documentaries . . . . .	71
<b>Newsletters and Memos</b> . . . . .	71

## **TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES: Anchor 3 . . . . .72**

*Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 3*   72

*Decision Tree for Writing Anchor 3*   73

## **Demonstration   74**

### **OVERARCHING LESSON   75**

<b>MINILESSONS</b> . . . . .	88
<b>Finding a Topic</b> . . . . .	88
<b>Creating an Event Sequence</b> . . . . .	89
Sketch the sequence . . . . .	89
Jot notes about the sequence . . . . .	89
Use a narrative map . . . . .	89
Use sticky notes . . . . .	89

<b>Establishing the “Situation”</b> . . . . .	90
<b>Using Description</b> . . . . .	91
Detailing a person, place, or thing. . . . .	91
Elaborating an event. . . . .	92
Using sensory details . . . . .	92
Showing, not telling. . . . .	92
Drawing from word lists . . . . .	92
Rewording . . . . .	93
Learning from professional authors . . . . .	93
<b>Using Dialogue</b> . . . . .	94
Learning from professional authors . . . . .	94
Trying out speech bubbles . . . . .	94
Practicing with a painting . . . . .	94
Practicing with a picture book . . . . .	95
Weaving in dialogue . . . . .	95
Scripting comic strips . . . . .	95
Filling in a story. . . . .	95
Using dialogue tags . . . . .	95
<b>Using Words and Phrases to Signal Event Order.</b> .96	
Making the process explicit . . . . .	96
Learning from other students . . . . .	96
Learning from professional authors . . . . .	97
Practice with sequencing. . . . .	97
<b>Pacing</b> . . . . .	97
Weighting the ideas . . . . .	97
Exploring pacing techniques. . . . .	98
<b>Crafting a Narrative Text Title</b> . . . . .	99
Playing with three . . . . .	99
Rationalizing a text title . . . . .	99
Rationalizing title preferences . . . . .	99
Using graphic design. . . . .	99
<b>Providing a Sense of Closure</b> . . . . .	99
Learning from professional authors . . . . .	99
Trying different closure techniques . . . . .	100

## **Collaborative Engagement 101**

<b>Analyzing and Evaluating Writing Samples from the Classroom</b> . . . . .	101
<b>Analyzing and Evaluating Mentor Text.</b> . . . .	101
<b>Conferring with the Teacher</b> . . . . .	103
<b>Conferring with Peers</b> . . . . .	103

## **Independent Application 105**

Personal Narrative . . . . .	105
Memoir . . . . .	105
Testimonio. . . . .	106
Oral History. . . . .	106
Biography . . . . .	106
Narrative Fiction. . . . .	107

## **PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WRITING: Anchor 4 . . .109**

*Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 4* 109

*Decision Tree for Writing Anchor 4* 110

## **Demonstration 111**

### **OVERARCHING LESSON 112**

#### **MINILESSONS: CLARITY AND COHERENCE . . . . .116**

Rereading . . . . .116

Staying on Topic . . . . .116

Including Everything Important. . . . .117

Weeding Out the Unimportant . . . . .118

Attending to Sentence Order . . . . .118

Use every other line . . . . .119

Number the sentences. . . . .119

Attending to Sentence Content . . . . .119

Sentence dividing. . . . .119

Sentence combining . . . . .119

Paragraphing. . . . .120

Identifying the uses of a paragraph . . . . .120

Paragraph locating . . . . .121

Paragraph dividing . . . . .121

#### **MINILESSONS: APPROPRIATENESS TO TASK, PURPOSE, AND AUDIENCE . . . . .122**

Choosing Appropriate Content . . . . .122

Choosing Appropriate Formats and Media . . . . .123

Attending to Voice . . . . .124

Reading and listening . . . . .124

Studying different voices on the same topic . . . . .127

Adding voice . . . . .127

Removing voice . . . . .	127
Practice matching voice with task, purpose, and audience. . . . .	127

<b>Merging Attention to Role, Audience, Format, and Topic (RAFT) . . . . .</b>	<b>128</b>
--	------------

## **Collaborative Engagement 130**

Analyzing and Evaluating Writing Samples from the Classroom . . . . .	130
Conferring with the Teacher . . . . .	130
Conferring with Peers . . . . .	131

## **Independent Application 133**

## **PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WRITING: Anchor 5 . . . 134**

<i>Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 5</i> . . . . .	134
<i>Decision Tree for Writing Anchor 5</i> . . . . .	135

## **Demonstration 136**

### **OVERARCHING LESSON 137**

<b>MINILESSONS . . . . .</b>	<b>143</b>
Quick Editing Minilessons . . . . .	143
Using an Editing Checklist . . . . .	143
Using Copy Editing Symbols . . . . .	144
Encouraging the Circling of Suspicious Spellings . . . . .	144
Studying Correct or Incorrect Usage . . . . .	145
Using an Editing Circle . . . . .	145
Playing with Punctuation . . . . .	146
Opportunities for Rereading . . . . .	146

## **Collaborative Engagement 147**

Analyzing and Evaluating Writing Samples from the Classroom . . . . .	147
Analyzing and Evaluating Mentor Text. . . . .	147

Conferring with the Teacher . . . . .	148
Conferring with Peers . . . . .	149

## **Independent Application 151**

### **PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WRITING: Anchor 6 . . . 152**

<i>Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 6</i>	152
--	-----

## **Demonstration 153**

### **STRUCTURING THE LESSONS 154**

Whole Class . . . . .	154
Small Group . . . . .	154

## **Producing and Publishing Writing 156**

Word Processors . . . . .	156
Publishers . . . . .	156
Web-Based Composing Tools . . . . .	156
Apps for Composing . . . . .	159
Digitally Created Visuals . . . . .	160

### **INTERACTING AND COLLABORATING WITH OTHERS 161**

Document Projectors . . . . .	161
Interactive Whiteboards . . . . .	161
Web-Based Document Sharing Platforms . . . . .	161
Student-Created Websites and Web Pages . . . . .	162
Blogs . . . . .	162
Social Media and Networking Sites . . . . .	162

## **Independent Application . . . . .163**

### **RESEARCH TO BUILD AND PRESENT KNOWLEDGE: Anchor 7 . . . . .164**

<i>Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 7</i>	164
--	-----

## **Planning and Demonstration 165**

### **PLANNING RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES 166**

### **OVERARCHING LESSON 168**

## **Collaborative and Independent Application 171**



**RESEARCH TO BUILD  
AND PRESENT KNOWLEDGE: Anchor 8 . . . . . 172**

*Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 8* 172

**Demonstration 173**

USING NOTE-TAKING FORMS 174

MARKING PRINT SOURCES 178

MARKING DIGITAL SOURCES 179

**Independent Application 181**

**RESEARCH TO BUILD  
AND PRESENT KNOWLEDGE: Anchor 9 . . . . . 182**

*Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 9* 182

**Demonstration 183**

OVERARCHING LESSON 184

**Collaborative Engagement 191**

Analyze and Evaluate Writing Samples  
from the Classroom . . . . . 191

Conferring with the Teacher . . . . . 191

Conferring with Peers . . . . . 191

**Independent Application 193**

**RANGE OF WRITING: Anchor 10 . . . . . 194**

*Grade-Level Standards for Writing: Anchor 10* 194

**Supporting Routine and Wide Writing 195**

*Appendix* 197

*Works Cited* 217

## Overview

Everywhere we turn, conversations about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are at hand. National conferences are providing sessions; state departments are holding meetings; books and journal articles are being published; blogs are buzzing; websites are being developed; and teachers are sharing ideas. For the first time ever, schools across the United States are using a common set of literacy standards to guide assessment and instruction—and educators and school leaders are grappling with the implications.

Many have examined their existing practices in light of the new standards and are making curricular and instructional overhauls in the areas they feel need their attention first. Others are wondering whether it is enough to simply be aware of the new standards—and for the most part to continue with or gently tweak existing practices. Others, admittedly, have never paid much attention to state standards and are wondering if there is a reason to pay attention now. Some educators are concerned that new standards—regardless of how they are used—may not have much positive impact on student learning; after all, good teaching is good teaching regardless of the standards we have. And there are others who fear that because standards are quite often linked with standardized testing, teachers will feel compelled to place an emphasis on test preparation rather than on fostering broadly meaningful literacy. Clearly, the issues are complex.

## Some Options

Within such complexity, we could approach the adoption of the standards in a number of ways. We could sit tight until we have more information about how the new assessments will play out, or until we know exactly what our state offices will be recommending regarding curriculum development. But this suggests that the important professional knowledge lies outside the school, and that educators should wait to make changes even though they may already have some of their own powerful ideas ruminating. And, in fact, many educators across the country have already been busy making decisions about the new standards and how to use them as a starting point to make instruction better: more engaging, more challenging, and more in tune with their students' needs.

So another possible response is to get focused and quickly start teaching and assessing in light of the new standards. Schools could scramble to provide professional learning experiences for teachers: right now, right away. They could make quick switches to new types of lesson planning and new

report cards, and individual teachers could start searching for new ideas to try out and share. But such efforts don't necessarily involve a system for nurturing a balanced or manageable approach to improvement that is based on solid evidence, planning, and discussion.

Yet another option is for educators to come together and start looking for curricular programs that advertise “comprehensive” and “research-based” ways to meet the new standards. There has been an asymptotic rise in programs touting a strong alignment with the CCSS. But we are teaching in an era in which research evidence has confirmed that the *teaching*—not the program—is the most important variable affecting student achievement (Cunningham and Allington 2011). Research has not identified any single approach to teaching writing that is going to be effective with every learner (Writing Now 2008).

## ***The Places We Could Go***

At the crossroads created by the Common Core State Standards, there are many paths we could take. Because effective teaching does not emerge from a set of standards, a mandate, a state office, or a manual, we must avoid paths that cast educators as secondary decision makers or that offer quick solutions or static packages. Effective teaching results from the skillful weaving of curriculum, carefully selected instructional practices, and thoughtful responses to children's daily activity. Therefore, we must use this crossroads as an opportunity for educators to focus on *teaching*—and on *improving teaching*—to meet this new set of standards that has raised the expectations for student learning higher than ever.

School and district teams can start by implementing the most promising practices known to date, and this book is designed to support this effort. The instrumental practices you will find on the following pages have been used effectively by many teachers; here they are altered and redesigned with special attention to the CCSS. Of course, we can't just implement these practices without also watching our students. Along with teaching practices you will find support for observing students and collecting data to improve and fine-tune your instruction. It is recommended that planned observation be initiated with each new lesson taught; with each new day; with each new unit or theme. Effective teaching involves taking note of children's knowledge and responses to instruction and actively responding in light of both.

As we shape the new system and work within it, we must take care to not lose sight of *meaningful* teaching and learning. In working toward the new standards, kids are going to be doing hard things. Kindergarten and first-grade students are to compose opinion pieces; second- and third-grade

students are to use technology (including keyboarding) to produce and publish writing; fourth- and fifth-grade students are to research and write about content-area topics—and they are expected to use grade-level reading material to do so. Aiming for students to perform well with such tasks doesn't mean that we must abandon our work toward a meaningful curriculum. Within the new system, teachers who have managed to “get it right” with writing can still allow students to write for authentic reasons; they can still support their exploration of multiple genres, when the time is right to explore these genres; they can still offer students choices; and they can still arrange for them to begin to shape through their writing meaningful legacies as human beings. Children can still write for reasons that matter. These goals are not inconsistent with the goals of the Common Core State Standards—and in fact having them in place will strengthen our work with the standards.

But as we consider the new standards, the time *is* ripe for improvement. Not all teachers are effective teachers of writing. Many have a very limited writing curriculum, as evidenced by kindergarten and first-grade students writing mostly on worksheets or mostly to develop letter recognition and phonics knowledge; second- and third-grade students writing only in journals or only for ten minutes each morning; fourth- and fifth-grade students writing only from personal experience or mostly from assigned prompts that are reflective of items appearing on the state test. Not all teachers have a plan in place for observing students and shaping and differentiating their instruction based on actual classroom observations. Not all teachers have a system in place for collaborating with other teachers and staying in tune with new findings in the field. There is work to be done. This book can help.

## Organization of the Book

The goal of *The Common Core Writing Book* is to support K–5 teachers as they provide differentiated instruction in relation to the ten Common Core writing standards. (See Table A.) The book is organized into ten sections, one for each standard. The ten *anchor* standards provide overarching goals for K–12 students, while more specific sets of standards (outlined at the beginning of each section of the book) define the specific competencies K–5 students are expected to develop by each year's end.

In general, students are expected to work with their grade-level standards. This is with the understanding that some students will need extra support mastering certain competencies from earlier grades before they can demonstrate full competency with their own grade-level standards. In turn, others may be ready to move forward and explore concepts beyond the range recommended. When planning instruction it is helpful to look below and

Table A

Category	Anchor Standards for Writing	Page
<b>Text Types and Purposes</b>	1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.	<b>1</b>
	2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.	<b>36</b>
	3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.	<b>72</b>
<b>Production and Distribution of Writing</b>	4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Begins in grade 3.)	<b>109</b>
	5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.	<b>134</b>
	6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.	<b>152</b>
<b>Research to Build and Present Knowledge</b>	7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.	<b>164</b>
	8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.	<b>172</b>
	9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (Begins in grade 4.)	<b>182</b>
<b>Range of Writing</b>	10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. (Begins in grade 3.)	<b>194</b>

beyond your grade level to understand the full context for what students are being asked to do.

Any time we think about instruction in writing, we are in a natural position to also think about instruction in *language*, and the Common Core Language standards provide some focus. Of particular importance to writing, the first three Language standards address (1) *grammar and usage*; (2) *punctuation, capitalization, and spelling*; and (3) *understanding how language functions in different contexts*. Therefore, ideas for embedding language instruction into writing instruction are included in this book, with a special focus on the first three Language standards. (See Table B.)

Table B

Category	Anchor Standards for <i>Language</i>	
<b>Conventions of Standard English</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</li> <li>2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</li> </ol>	These standards are addressed in the lessons for Writing Anchor 5.
<b>Knowledge of Language</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</li> </ol>	This standard is addressed in the lessons for Writing Anchors 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.
<b>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials as appropriate.</li> <li>5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</li> <li>6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.</li> </ol>	These standards are addressed in <i>The Common Core Lesson Book</i> (Owocki 2012). See both the <i>Literature</i> and <i>Informational Text</i> sections.

## The Types of Instruction

Rather than providing a curriculum with suggested maps and timelines, *The Common Core Writing Book* provides you with a comprehensive framework of strategies for enhancing a curriculum that is already in place, or for developing your own. For each standard/skill area, three types of experience are suggested:

- Demonstration
- Collaborative Engagement
- Independent Application

This layout makes it possible to implement an approach of demonstrating various techniques and strategies for writing, giving students opportunities to write and try out the strategies in a supportive environment, and ultimately encouraging a gradual takeover of responsibility and control by the students.

Suggestions for differentiating and intensifying instruction are offered in the form of minilessons and teacher conferencing—both of which take shape in response to observations of students and their writing.

## Demonstration

Teacher guidance is high during the *demonstration* phase. The teacher uses an *overarching lesson* to lay out general expectations regarding what to include in a piece of writing, how to develop a piece of writing, or how to conduct research and record information. As students write and try out new ideas, techniques, strategies, and genres, *minilessons* are chosen based on observations of student writing and observations of students as they write. The overarching lessons and the minilessons can be used with small groups (including intervention-based groups) or the whole class, throughout the year. They should be selected and adapted based on the particular strengths and needs demonstrated in your classroom.

## Collaborative Engagement

Guidance is still high in the *collaborative engagement* phase, but with more allowance and encouragement for students to take responsibility for their own learning and discussion. In the collaborative engagement phase, students engage in group activity and conversation related to the concepts taught in the demonstration phase. Key experiences include students collaboratively evaluating samples of writing, studying particular elements of craft found in mentor texts, conferring with peers, and conferring with the teacher.

## Independent Application

In the *independent application* phase, students are given time to write for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences supporting their participation in a range of discipline-specific writing experiences. Suggestions are provided for engaging students in writing in different genres, conducting research projects, reporting information, and drawing information from texts. Regularly during the independent application phase, you may cycle back to demonstration and collaborative engagement to provide further guidance.

# TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES

## ANCHOR 1

### English Language Arts Standards: Writing **ANCHOR 1**

**Writing Anchor 1:** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Kindergarten	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic or the name of the book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book (e.g., <i>My favorite book is . . .</i> ).	Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name of the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.	Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., <i>because, and, also</i> ) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.</li> <li>b. Provide reasons that support the opinion.</li> <li>c. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., <i>because, therefore, since, for example</i>) to connect opinion and reasons.</li> <li>d. Provide a concluding statement or section.</li> </ul>	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose.</li> <li>b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.</li> <li>c. Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., <i>for instance, in order to, in addition</i>).</li> <li>d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.</li> </ul>	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.</li> <li>b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.</li> <li>c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., <i>consequently, specifically</i>).</li> <li>d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.</li> </ul>



## Decision Tree for **Writing** ANCHOR 1

### Is now a good time for focused instruction in relation to Writing Anchor 1?

Anchor 1 requires that students *write opinion pieces focused on texts or topics*. When your students have reason to express their opinions through writing, it is recommended that you implement three types of instruction:

**Demonstration**  
Page 3

**Collaborative Engagement**  
Page 27

**Independent Application**  
Page 31

An initial overarching demonstration occurs first, followed by a formative assessment. After analyzing the assessment data, you can use the information below to decide what to teach next and whether this instruction is needed for the whole class or small groups.



#### Minilessons

After the overarching lesson and formative assessment, choose from the following based on student needs:

- Generating Meaningful Topics (page 19)
- Stating an Opinion (page 19)
- Outlining Reasons for an Opinion (page 22)
- Creating an Organizational Structure (page 23)
- Crafting a Strong Introduction (page 24)
- Providing a Sense of Closure (page 25)



#### Collaborative Engagement

Use the following experiences to encourage deeper consideration of key writing concepts:

- Analyzing and Evaluating Writing Samples from the Classroom (page 27)
- Analyzing and Evaluating Mentor Text (page 28)
- Conferring with the Teacher (page 29)
- Conferring with Peers (page 30)



#### Independent Application

When you have students ready to explore new genres of opinion writing, consider the following:

- Personal Responses to Literature (page 31)
- Book Reviews (page 31)
- Literary Essays (page 32)
- Persuasive Letters (page 32)
- Persuasive Essays (page 33)
- Blogs (page 33)
- Persuasive Video or Photo Documentaries (page 34)
- Advertisements (page 34)

You may cycle back through these applications throughout the year, addressing techniques for revising and editing as described in Sections 4 and 5; bringing in technology as described in Section 6; and teaching research skills as described in Sections 7–9.

## Demonstration

Anchor 1 requires that students write *opinion pieces* focused on texts or topics. An opinion piece may range from a brief statement of preference supported by an illustration to an elaborated point of view supported by a carefully organized set of reasons and information. Opinion pieces can be composed in varied formats, such as personal responses to literature, book reviews, persuasive letters, persuasive essays, literary essays, advertisements, and blogs. They may be written in first or third person.

Learning to write a high-quality opinion piece can enrich learning across content areas. With such skill, students can develop substance for conversations about literature and art; they can deliberate meaningfully about topics in science and health; and they can begin to take a stance on social issues that are important to them. In fact, instruction in opinion writing develops some of the most critical skills necessary for active participation in a democratic society. “If young people grow up learning to participate in logical, reasoned, evidenced-based arguments, this will mean that they are given a voice. Our democracy is dependent on an educated, concerned citizenry, exercising the right to be heard” (Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman 2012, 136).

To get your students started on opinion writing, it is recommended that you provide an overarching lesson highlighting the key elements to include. The lesson that follows features a set of tools for teaching a flexible beginning structure for an opinion piece as well as an assessment tool to help you identify key next steps for instruction. The lesson may be implemented as many times as needed, and may be used any time a new genre or format for opinion writing is introduced.

## Overarching Lesson

To prepare for this lesson, have in mind a format (such as a letter or a book review) and a topic related to your curriculum or to a recent event or discussion in your classroom. You will be demonstrating how to organize and write an opinion piece appropriate to your grade level, and then providing time and support for students to write their own.

### 1. Purpose

- Discuss the general purpose of an opinion piece. Help students understand that opinion pieces are written to share a viewpoint, or to “make a case.” We might write a book review with the goal of convincing everyone in the class that the text is funny and worth reading; we might write a note to a parent to make a case for allowing a stray cat to come inside; we might write an editorial for the community pleading for an end to littering.
- Tell students that you will be showing them some important things to include in an opinion piece. Explain your chosen topic and format and let them know that they will be writing a piece using the same format.

### 2. Expectations.

Briefly show students the expectations for opinion writing at your grade level. Use an enlarged *checklist* (Figure 1–2) or a *map* that includes your required grade-level components (Figures 1–3 to 1–5). Just quickly point out what is typically included in such a piece so that students have a sense of the text type before they write. Emphasize structure, but only to the point that it gives students ideas for creating substantive *content*. Too much emphasis on structure can lead students to plugging in ideas and words just to be “done” rather than allowing them to get a feel for putting a heartfelt opinion on paper.

### 3. Demonstration

- Use either the checklist or the map as a guide to show students how you play around with the organization of and lay out your ideas. Either *tell* students what you plan to include, showing where on the page you would place your ideas and any illustrations, or *draft the text as they observe*.
- Tell students that the parts you are showing them should be used in their own writing because they help to build a convincing case. *Note for using the maps:* Students may use a map as

their *only draft* or as their *plan*, composing the more formal piece after all the ideas have been laid out on the plan. Before asking students to create narrative from material laid out on a map, demonstrate the process, emphasizing concepts such as paragraphing and linking words.

#### 4. Student Writing

- Guide students to brainstorm a specific direction for their opinion pieces. (*My favorite book/painting in the display is \_\_\_\_\_ because. . . . This character/historical figure is brave because. . . . We should have a rule that \_\_\_\_\_ because. . . .*). Figure 1–1 offers a set of open-ended prompts to help you get started. Early on, encourage a focus on familiar topics so that students can put their energy into including the key structural elements. Later, they can tackle content that may require new reading or referencing sources.
- Arrange adequate time for students to write. Let them know that this is a “show what you know” piece that you will use to inform your next steps in instruction.

#### FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Although English learners (ELs) may go through a period in which they don’t say much in class, we can rest assured that they have opinions just like the rest. Work with ELs in light of their specific topics to ensure they get a strong start. For example, you might:

- Work together to develop the language for the opinion statement and then send the student off to write or draw the rest of the piece, checking in as necessary.
- Work together to construct the opinion statement as well as the language for one of the “reasons,” and then send the student off to develop that reason before checking in again.
- Work together to construct the opinion statement and a starter sentence for each reason and then send the student off to complete the piece independently.

You may have other students you want to pull in for step-by-step support as well. But as a rule of thumb, avoid *always* placing ELs with students who are expressing difficulty with the content or not achieving at grade level. Students learning a new language only sometimes have the same needs as students who are not meeting grade-level expectations.

**FOR ALL STUDENTS**

When guiding students to develop opinion pieces, be aware that personal, familial, social, and cultural influences are always at play in children's lives and will impact the ways in which they proceed. For example, some students are generally less open to expressing personal opinions than others; some may not want to express an opinion that might disrupt a sense of harmony with others; some families may believe it is inappropriate for children to express opinions about what parents should do or how they should behave; and some students may be uncomfortable expressing opinions in relation to political issues or the actions of political leaders.

5. **Assessment.** When you have collected an opinion piece from all of your students, evaluate the writing to determine the extent to which students are meeting your grade-level expectations for Anchor 1. Using a class record (Figures 1–6 to 1–11) will offer an overview of what the class needs and will show individual students' growth from a pre- to a postassessment.

**Using Assessment to Inform Instruction**

To continue your instruction after the initial assessment, first decide whether students will move on to a new piece or revise/continue to work with the current piece. As you provide minilessons, students need to have specific pieces in mind to which they can apply the concepts you are teaching. If the class record shows that most students could use instruction in a particular area, it is advisable to keep the class together for the minilessons. If the record shows varied needs, then provide a mix of minilessons, pulling students in to work with you depending on the needs they have demonstrated. The decision tree on page 2 can help you to set your course.

Figure 1–1

### Prompts to Support Opinion Writing

- **Write to show your opinion about a topic we have studied in science.**  
(Examples: forest conservation, recycling.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a topic we have studied in social studies.** (Examples: equal rights, an issue on a current ballot.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a topic we have recently discussed.**  
(Examples: becoming bilingual, standing up to bullying.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a text or piece of art you have read/ listened to/viewed.** (Examples: argue that a text should be read by everyone in fifth grade; argue for a theme.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a character or real person in a text.**  
(Examples: argue that someone is heroic or brave.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a person you know or a person in the news.** (Examples: write to share the opinion that someone is a good friend or excellent family member; that someone is making a positive impact on the world; that someone would make a good president or leader in the school.)
- **Write to show your opinion about something important to you.**  
(Examples: argue that pets are important; argue that we learn important things by watching television or playing video games.)
- **Write to show your opinion about something that you enjoy.** (Examples: argue that a certain book, game, video game, or electronic device has a value such as being interesting, fun, educational, thought-provoking, or funny.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a product or place.** (Examples: review a toy; argue for a best restaurant or best place to visit.)
- **Write to show your opinion about something you want to change.**  
(Examples: argue for less homework or a different kind of homework; argue for the reinstatement of afternoon recess.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a way to make the world a better place.** (Examples: argue that animals should not be used in circuses; argue that plastic shopping bags should be banned.)
- **Write to show your opinion about a specific assigned concept or idea.**  
(Examples: We have excellent/poor reading material in our classroom; timed tests are a good/poor tool for learning; rewards are important/not necessary to encourage reading; we should/should not always wear a helmet when biking or skateboarding.)

## CHECKLIST OF EXPECTATIONS FOR WRITING ANCHOR 1

### Kindergarten

- ☐ Tells the topic or title.
- ☐ States opinion or preference.

### Grade 1

- ☐ Introduces the topic or title.
- ☐ States an opinion.
- ☐ Supplies a reason for the opinion.
- ☐ Provides closure.

### Grade 2

- ☐ Introduces the topic or text.
- ☐ States an opinion.
- ☐ Supplies reasons that support the opinion.
- ☐ Uses linking words.
- ☐ Provides a conclusion.

### Grade 3

- ☐ Introduces the topic or text.
- ☐ States an opinion.
- ☐ Creates a structure that lists reasons.
- ☐ Provides reasons that support the opinion.
- ☐ Uses linking words and phrases.
- ☐ Provides a conclusion.

### Grade 4

- ☐ Introduces the topic or text.
- ☐ States an opinion.
- ☐ Creates a structure for grouping related ideas.
- ☐ Provides reasons supported by facts and details.
- ☐ Uses linking words and phrases.
- ☐ Provides a conclusion.

### Grade 5

- ☐ Introduces the topic or text.
- ☐ States an opinion.
- ☐ Creates a structure that logically groups ideas.
- ☐ Provides logically ordered reasons supported by facts and details.
- ☐ Uses linking words and phrases.
- ☐ Provides a conclusion.

Figure 1–3

**Opinion Map: Kindergarten**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**Text or Topic****Opinion or Preference**



Figure 1–4

**Opinion Map: Grade 1**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction to  
Text or Topic****Opinion****Reason****Closure**

Figure 1–5

**Opinion Map: Grades 2–5**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction to  
Text or Topic****Opinion  
Statement****Reason**Supporting Facts and Details  
(You may use sticky notes here.)**Reason**Supporting Facts and Details  
(You may use sticky notes here.)

(continues)

Figure 1–5 (continued)

**Opinion Map: Grades 2–5**

This diagram is a template for an opinion map, designed for students in grades 2–5. It consists of three main sections arranged vertically. The top section is divided into two identical columns. Each column has a rounded rectangular box at the top labeled "Reason" in a smaller oval. Below each "Reason" box is a larger rounded rectangular box labeled "Supporting Facts and Details (You may use sticky notes here.)". The bottom section is a single, wide rounded rectangular box labeled "Conclusion" in a smaller oval at its top center. The entire map is enclosed in a thin black border.

**Reason**

Supporting Facts and Details  
(You may use sticky notes here.)

**Reason**

Supporting Facts and Details  
(You may use sticky notes here.)

**Conclusion**

## Class Record for Opinion Writing: Kindergarten

[illegible]

**0 = Not Present**

**1 = Could Use Development**

**2 = Developed**

## Class Record for Opinion Writing: Grade 1

**2 = Developed**

## Class Record for Opinion Writing: Grade 2

[illegible]

**0 = Not Present**

**1 = Could Use Development**

**2 = Developed**

## Class Record for Opinion Writing: Grade 3

**2 = Developed**

## Class Record for Opinion Writing: Grade 4

**2 = Developed**



## Class Record for Opinion Writing: Grade 5

**2 = Developed**

## Minilessons

Through your initial observations and assessments, you will note some specific areas in which you want to provide additional instruction—either for certain students or the whole class. The minilessons may be implemented with small groups or the whole class.

### Generating Meaningful Topics

Topics for opinion writing may come from the texts children are reading, the curricula they are studying, or from their life experiences. While you may occasionally assign some topics, allowing students to choose their own will yield the most engaged writing and therefore the best opportunities for teaching—provided that students choose meaningfully. The following procedures will help to support students in generating topics they care about.

1. Secure a writer's notebook that you can use for demonstrations with the whole class. Show students how to reserve a page for recording topic ideas related to opinion writing. As they observe, start a list of possible topics for your own writing. Your topic should represent the general topic area you want your students to pursue. (See Figure 1–1.) (If you are working with kindergarten students, you may sketch your ideas.)
2. Provide a writer's notebook for each student. Give students time to work with a partner or team to record at least three of their own ideas, staying within the parameters you have set. (Kindergarten students may sketch their ideas.) Encourage students to ask, “Is this something I care about? Do I want to convince others about this topic?” *Note:* As an alternative to having students create their own idea lists, develop a list of possibilities with the whole class. Students could then choose topics from the list or generate their own similar possibilities.

### Stating an Opinion

When talking with students or assessing their opinion pieces, it may become clear that the concept of *opinion* or *stating an opinion* is unclear. For example, one first-grade student's opinion statement about a favorite book was written as follows: “Traction Man had a *gen sut*” (*green suit*). While the student *did* think this event was funny (an opinion), he had not yet mastered the concept of *stating* an opinion. In another classroom, a kindergarten teacher tried to solve this issue with “Tell *why* you think your chosen book was

interesting.” This led to responses such as *Koko wotd a cnt!!!!!!* (*Koko wanted a kitten*). Again, an interesting part of the text involved the fact that a gorilla wanted a kitten, but the pieces sound more like retellings or descriptions than opinions. These children are doing good thinking and are ready to stretch their writing further. To help your students learn how to move forward with stating opinions about texts or topics, consider the following minilessons.

**“HERE’S WHAT I THOUGHT.”** Read aloud a carefully selected text. Choose something hilarious, terribly boring, gross, or surprising—something that will inspire students to express their opinions. Encourage each student to tell or write what they thought about the text, beginning the statement with “Here’s what *I* thought,” and using language to show it’s an opinion. “I thought this book was interesting because Koko wanted a kitten.” Emphasize that opinions may differ because they are personal viewpoints rather than something that is necessarily “true” or “fact.”

**“IN MY OPINION.”** Plan a firsthand experience in which students compare two objects or materials. For example, you might give teams a set of different bouncing balls or toy cars, two types of Play-Doh, or two different types of jump rope or Frisbee. The task of the team is to play, compare, and come up with an opinion about which materials are best to play with.

1. Tell students that you are going to team them up with two or three other students and give them some time to play. Let them know that they have a job to do. They will be given certain objects/toys to use, and they are to report back regarding which materials are “better” or “work better” *in their opinions*.
2. Give the students time to play. Monitor their activity in a way that helps them to talk about the materials and convene on an opinion about which is better or best. For example, “In our opinion, the heavy jump ropes are easier to use” or “In our opinion, the home-made Play-Doh is best for sculpting.”
3. Bring the groups back together to report on their findings. Act as scribe, helping students to articulate their findings in the form of opinion statements.

**Kindergarten:** Students may then copy their statement and either write or draw a picture that helps to show the reasons for their opinion.

**Grades 1–5:** You may either continue as scribe to record student reasons for their opinions or send students off in teams to record

their reasons. Use the opportunity to highlight the use of linking words and phrases (such as *because*, *also*, *therefore*, and *since*) to connect reasons and opinions. Beginning in grade 2, students are expected to use linking words in their opinion pieces. This experience can serve as preparation for students to compose their own pieces on the toys/materials explored.

**USING WORDS TO EXPRESS AN OPINION.** Exploring the specific vocabulary associated with opinion writing will help students learn to express opinions and develop understandings about the genre. This lesson is focused on expressing opinions about *literature*, but it can also be focused on expressing opinions about people, characters, topics, and issues.

1. Gather three or four texts that are familiar to the class and coach students to express their opinions about them. “In my opinion, this book was engaging,” “In my opinion, this book was weird,” or “I thought it was funny when. . . .” Pull out the most important words (*engaging*, *weird*, *funny*) and record them on chart paper. You may wish to create columns on the chart so that in subsequent minilessons students can generate words for expressing opinions about other things, such as characters or current issues. Figure 1–12 shows an example of the type of words that might be included on a chart you create with your students over the course of a few lessons.

Figure 1–12

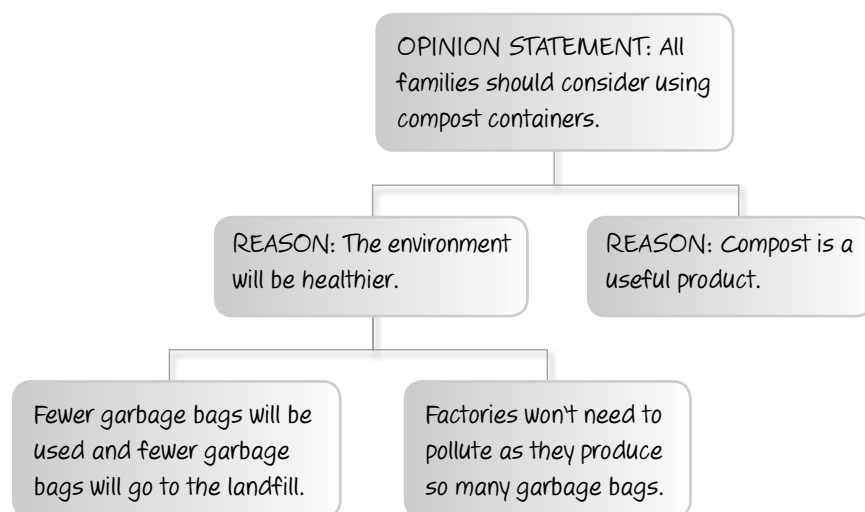
Using Words to Express an Opinion		
<u>Literature</u>	<u>Characters/People</u>	<u>Topics/Issues</u>
funny	important	best/worst
makes me think	caring	most/least
weird	principled	negative/positive
page-turner	knowledgeable	healthy/unhealthy
hard to understand	brave	safe/dangerous
has an important lesson	smart	harmful/helpful
quick-paced	kind	fair/unfair
engaging	funny	important/unimportant
sad	imaginative	sensible/senseless

2. Give students an additional text to discuss in a group. Familiar texts work best. Students jot down some describing words that express their opinions about it. Add the words to the chart.
3. Encourage students to think about and add to the opinion words as they are shaping their ideas for opinion pieces. Younger students who are using mostly drawing to express their opinions should be encouraged to use the words to label their drawings.

## Outlining Reasons for an Opinion

A strong opinion is backed by *reasons* supported with facts and details. The Common Core standards call for kindergarten and first-grade students to state an opinion or preference with a reason. In grade 2 and beyond, students are expected to use more than one reason. To support students in learning to argue with a set of reasons walk them through a visual outlining process.

1. Select a topic that is meaningful to the group and generate an opinion statement related to it. For example, within a thematic study of recycling, you might use, “All families should consider using compost containers.”
2. Put the opinion statement at the top of a page to form the beginning of a hierarchical visual (see below). Or use sticky notes so that you can move the ideas around. Avoid one-paragraph-per-reason formulas, as this may limit creativity and/or force bad paragraphing.



3. Work with the students to generate reasons for the opinion, listing each reason in its own box below the opinion statement. List any facts and details below the reasons. Use the opportunity to discuss the use of linking words such as *because*, *also*, *for example*, and *in addition* to create clarity and flow.
4. Encourage students to use a visual map to lay out the reasons behind their opinions as they prepare for or organize a piece.

## Creating an Organizational Structure

Children's opinion pieces often end up with a lot of good ideas in a mixed-up order, or with a lot of ideas, only some of which relate directly to the topic at hand. This can stem in part from writing without planning. To support student development of a logical flow in their opinion pieces, demonstrate any of the following planning processes, and then provide opportunities for students to try the process themselves. **IMPORTANT:** As students move from planning to composing, be sure to emphasize the incorporation of linking words to ensure a coherent piece.

**USE A PLANNING MAP.** Show how you can use a planning map to organize your ideas before writing. Figures 1–3, 1–4, and 1–5 are designed for this purpose. For grades 3–5, you may also wish to demonstrate the use of an interactive map from the web. ReadWriteThink offers an excellent tool for opinion writing: [www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/persuasion\\_map/](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/persuasion_map/).

**USE STICKY NOTES.** Show how you can use sticky notes to lay out an opinion piece. Write your opinion statement on one sticky note and then write reasons for your opinion on additional notes (one each). Line up the reasons beneath the opinion. As appropriate, use additional notes to add facts and details for each reason, tucking the notes under the reason. Write a conclusion and place that beneath the row of reasons.

**USE SUBTITLES.** As students gain experience categorizing their ideas or reasons (as with the sticky notes and planning maps above) show them how to create a subhead for each reason and possibly for the opinion statement and conclusion. Eventually, students can be encouraged to drop the maps or sticky notes as a scaffold and move straight to using subheads as they draft. Looking at professionally published literature will help them understand how to meaningfully name their subheads. For example, in *Protecting*

*Endangered Species*, instead of using “Reason 1,” “Reason 2,” “Reason 3,” and “Reason 4,” author Felicity Brooks *names* the reasons for protecting species: *Food for the future*, *Fuel from the forest*, *Marvelous medicines*, and *Enjoying our world*. As students begin to use subtitles in their own writing, you can begin to use student-created pieces to show good subtitle work.

### **Crafting a Strong Introduction**

Crafting a strong introduction is often one of the final tasks for the writer of an opinion piece. (It helps to have a sense of what the whole piece looks like before attempting the introduction.) Many students easily grasp the importance of introducing a piece. It just makes sense to let the reader know up front what it is going to be about. The challenge is to move beyond something formulaic. While a formulaic introduction *can* serve the function of setting the stage for a piece, it rarely has the draw of a more richly crafted introduction. A strong introduction to an opinion piece hooks the reader and starts building openness toward the case being made.

**LEARN FROM PROFESSIONAL AUTHORS.** Show students the openings to a small set of opinion pieces or statements and ask what makes them strong or not strong. (Figure 1–16 provides a recommended set of texts.)

**TRY DIFFERENT OPENING TECHNIQUES.** Compile a list of three or four techniques for opening an opinion statement. (You can add to the list over time.) Start with a direct or formulaic option so that students can compare it with other techniques. Post the list with a set of examples related to a piece you are currently using for demonstration, discussing the techniques you have listed (see Figure 1–13). For whatever piece they are working on, assign students to try out two or three different openings and then work with a peer or team to help determine a favorite.

Figure 1–13

### Techniques for Opening an Opinion Statement

- **Direct statement:** This essay is about smoking. I think people should avoid smoking.
- **Personal connection:** My friend Gordon was starting to cough more often. The doctor said it was because he had been smoking for 22 years. Being friends with Gordon, I have an opinion about smoking. I think people should avoid it.
- **“Draw-in” question:** Do you know someone who smokes? Do you ever worry about this person’s health? Smoking can be hazardous to health and kids should think twice before starting.
- **Fact-based question:** Did you know that smoking causes about 20 percent of our country’s deaths each year? I think it’s important to avoid smoking.
- **Fact or detail:** Smoking causes about 20 percent of our country’s deaths each year. In my opinion, people should avoid smoking.
- **Quotation:** “Smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the United States” (<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/body/smoking/article2.html>). I think people should avoid smoking.
- **Analogy:** A cigarette is like a little piece of poison. I think people should avoid smoking.
- **Snapshot:** On Saturday, my friend Gordon held his cigarettes over the trash can in the parking lot and cut them in half with scissors. I think this was a pretty good idea.
- **Observation from the senses:** Gordon’s car already smells better. He hasn’t smoked in his car for a whole month! Aside from a fresh car, there are lots of reasons to avoid smoking.

### Providing a Sense of Closure

The end of an opinion piece is just as important as the introduction. An ending should provide a sense of closure, and help the reader to consider the key point one more time, perhaps through a new lens. Yet students often fall into a formulaic ending that doesn’t pack much power. They close with statements such as “And those were three reasons we thought you should read this article” or “And that’s why I think littering is a bad choice.” The following strategies may be implemented to help your students explore different closure techniques.



Figure 1–14

### Techniques for Closure

- **Reinforcement:** Rephrase your introductory statement about the case you want to make. Focus on reinforcing rather than repeating.
- **Quotation:** Find a quotation that backs your opinion. You might need to write something before or after the quotation so that it makes sense to the reader.
- **Short story:** End with a very short personal story related to the opinion.
- **Question:** End with a question that will get readers to think about their own opinions on the matter.
- **Humor:** End with a humorous statement.
- **Image:** End with a captioned photo or illustration that supports your opinion.

**LEARN FROM PROFESSIONAL AUTHORS.** Show students the endings to a small set of opinion pieces/statements and ask what makes them strong or not strong. (Figure 1–16 provides a recommended set of texts.)

**TRY DIFFERENT CLOSURE TECHNIQUES.** Review a set of closure techniques, using your own writing as an example. Assign students to try two or three different techniques in their own pieces and then work with a partner or team to select a favorite. (Figure 1–14 provides some example techniques.)

# Collaborative Engagement

To enhance their understanding of key opinion-writing concepts, arrange for students to engage in collaborative analysis and evaluation experiences, peer conferences, and teacher conferences.

## Analyzing and Evaluating Writing Samples from the Classroom

After teaching students about the key elements of an opinion piece (as per grade-level standards), give groups a sample of student writing (or use teacher writing if you don't yet have a student sample) and ask them to analyze it in light of particular criteria. When working with Anchor 1, select from questions such as those featured in Figure 1–15. After groups meet you can bring the whole class together for a follow-up discussion.

Figure 1–15

### Questions for Analyzing and Evaluating Opinion Pieces

#### Grades K–5

- Can you tell how the author feels about the topic? How?
- How is the opinion stated or shown?
- What reasons are given or shown for the opinion? Are there other reasons or details the author could include?
- What key words and phrases are used to express the opinion?

#### Grades 1–5

- How does the author introduce the piece? Does the introduction begin to draw the reader toward the opinion? How? If not, what other ideas could the author try?
- What reasons does the author use to help convince? Who would be drawn toward these reasons?
- How did the author close the piece? If the closing doesn't move you, what other ideas could the author try?

#### Grades 2–5

- How is this piece organized?
- What linking words are used?

## Analyzing and Evaluating Mentor Text

Using a specific set of questions (as in Figure 1–15) to analyze the craft within professionally published literature or websites can open students to new ideas to consider for their own writing. Figure 1–16 offers a starter list of texts that includes letters, book reviews, movie reviews, and stories.

1. Show students how to reserve a section of a writing notebook to record great ideas or language from mentor texts. They need not record all ideas encountered, but should instead focus on their favorites.

Figure 1–16

### Mentor Texts for Opinion Writing

#### Children’s Literature with Opinions and Arguments

- *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type* (Doreen Cronin)
- *Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School* (Mark Teague)
- *Ike for Mayor: Letters from the Campaign* (Mark Teague)
- *Otto Runs for President* (Rosemary Wells)
- *Duck for President* (Doreen Cronin)
- *Vote for Me!* (Ben Clanton)
- *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* (Jon Scieszka)
- *The Perfect Pet* (Margie Palatini)
- *I Wanna New Room* (Karen Orloff)
- *Those Shoes* (Maribeth Boelts)
- *All the Places to Love* (Patricia MacLachlan)
- *Hey, Little Ant!* (Phillip Hoose)

#### Websites with Reviews

[www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)

[www.kidsfirst.org](http://www.kidsfirst.org)

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

[www.bestcatbreeds.com](http://www.bestcatbreeds.com)

<http://animal.discovery.com/breed-selector/dog-breeds.html>

<http://animal.discovery.com/breedselector/catselectorindex.do>

<http://www.toyportfolio.com/>

2. After students read, view, or listen to a text, set them up in groups and give each a copy of the text, directing them to a specific section as appropriate. Assign the groups to work through one to three guiding questions, such as those featured in Figure 1–15. You can differentiate by having different groups work with different questions or texts. In preparation for responding back to the larger group or class, they can jot their ideas in their notebooks.
3. Arrange time for the groups to report their findings and observations.

### Conferring with the Teacher

Conferences are important for all student writers. Conference time may be used to listen to students talk and help them articulate their opinions, to teach a specific strategy, or for a quick follow-up to see how newly learned strategies are being incorporated. As a rule of thumb, keep the focus on *teaching the writer* rather than *perfecting the piece*. It can be tempting to help the student create a flawless piece, but it is generally more beneficial to focus on one key concept or strategy that the student can carefully consider and internalize.

When conferring in relation to Anchor 1, keep your focus on Anchor 1 objectives. Organizing the conference with a predictable set of prompts and questions can help students know what to expect and be ready to show you their thinking. See Figure 1–17.

Figure 1–17

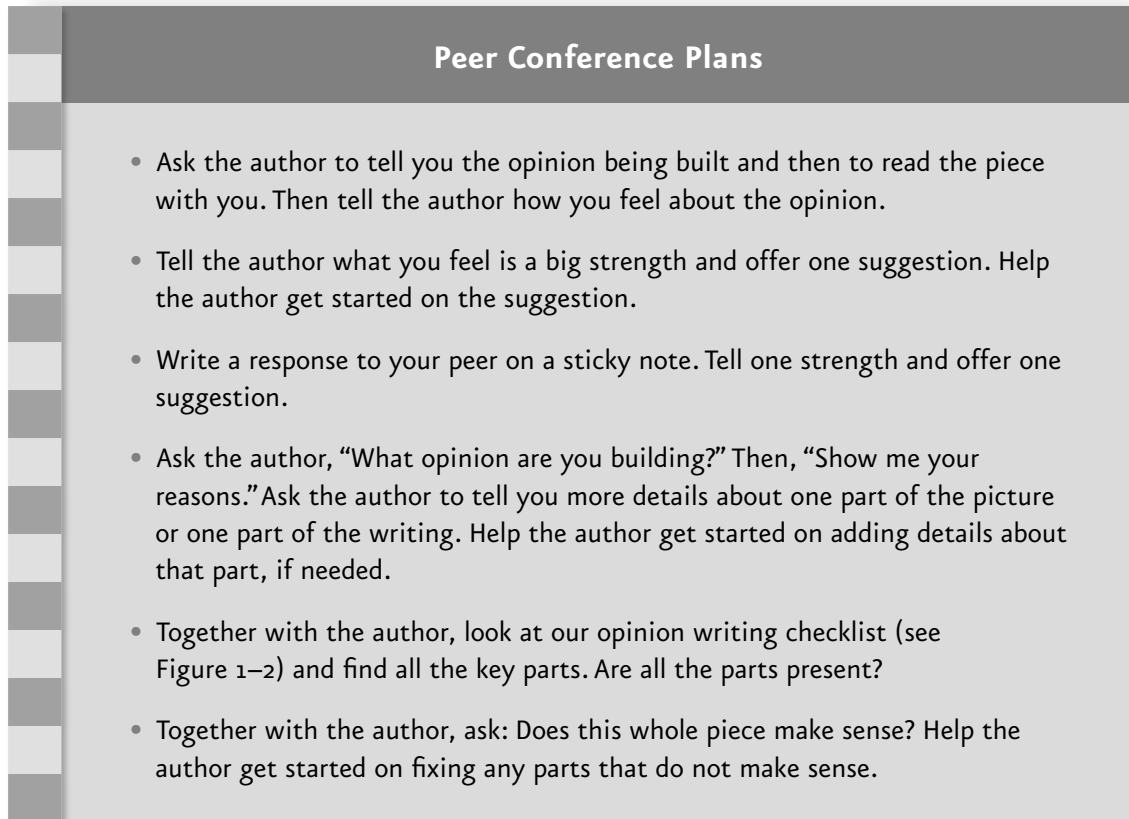
#### Conference Routine

- **Open the conversation.** *How are things going with this piece? Show me how you built your opinion. Is there something you need help with?*
- **Identify notable strengths.** *This part of your drawing catches my eye because. . . . Your introduction draws me in because. . . . Your reason for this opinion is well developed because. . . . This conclusion works so well because. . . .*
- **Identify one teaching point.** *What do you think you revise or do next from here? Can you show me how you will start? I have one thing I want you to develop and I'm going to help you get started.*
- **Send the student away with something manageable to develop.** *Let's get you started on this and then next time we meet we can talk about how it's going.*

## Conferring with Peers

Children can be very capable and responsible responders to their peers' writing, especially when they are given some starting expectations for their conversations. After they have some experience conferring with you, coach them to work in peer conferences through any of the processes featured in Figure 1–18.

Figure 1–18



### Peer Conference Plans

- Ask the author to tell you the opinion being built and then to read the piece with you. Then tell the author how you feel about the opinion.
- Tell the author what you feel is a big strength and offer one suggestion. Help the author get started on the suggestion.
- Write a response to your peer on a sticky note. Tell one strength and offer one suggestion.
- Ask the author, “What opinion are you building?” Then, “Show me your reasons.” Ask the author to tell you more details about one part of the picture or one part of the writing. Help the author get started on adding details about that part, if needed.
- Together with the author, look at our opinion writing checklist (see Figure 1–2) and find all the key parts. Are all the parts present?
- Together with the author, ask: Does this whole piece make sense? Help the author get started on fixing any parts that do not make sense.

# Independent Application

The independent application section offers suggestions for helping students move into different genres of opinion writing. You may cycle back through these applications throughout the year, addressing techniques for revising and editing as described in Sections 4 and 5, bringing in technology as described in Section 6, and teaching research skills as described in Sections 7–9. To introduce each new genre, you may wish to use the overarching lesson (page 4) as your instructional frame.

## Personal Responses to Literature

Personal responses to literature can make an excellent introduction to opinion writing. Attending to the key structural elements of an opinion piece, students may use any of the following formats to respond to a story, poem, or informational text.

### Grades K–1

- Students draw a picture to help show what the text was about and then express an opinion about it orally (small group or whole class).
- Students draw a picture and write or dictate to show an opinion about a text. The writing is compiled into a class book.

### Grades 2–5

- Students create a blurb for a professionally published or student-created book.
- Students create bulleted notes or a poster for a book talk to be delivered to the class.
- Students create a page for a class literary magazine, expressing a personal opinion about a book.
- Students create a blog that states an opinion about a book and ask classmates to respond with agreement or disagreement.

## Book Reviews

A book review, created with a somewhat more formal tone than a personal response to literature, is an evaluative piece that may come in the form of a poster, video clip, or written narrative. To guide students to write a book review, show them how to do the following:

- Tell something about the content without giving away the ending.
- Tell what was great or not so great about the piece.

### Opportunity to Emphasize

#### Language Standard 3

- Use a formal discourse/register for book talks, video clips, and written reviews. This is different from informally talking with one friend about a book.
- Choose effective, precise words and phrases.

- Tell what the author and illustrator did well or not well.
- Tell who should read this piece and why.

As with any type of opinion piece, the author provides details and reasons that help to explain the opinion.

## Literary Essays

Literary essays might sound like something beyond the skill level of most elementary students, but this genre can in fact be in tune with their developing capabilities. We generally don't introduce literary essays until around third or fourth grade because to work within the genre requires a merging of skills in the area of both opinion writing and text analysis—which take some time and instruction to develop.

A literary essay generally calls on students to make a claim or statement about a text that goes beyond the evaluative type statement seen in a book review. So, instead of considering *What did you like?*, students consider questions such as *What is the theme? What lesson do you think the author intended to teach? What kind of person is this character? How did this character change over time?* While literary essays aren't designed to “persuade” per se, students must provide reasons for the point they are developing.

To get started, students might be asked to identify a theme in a book such as Dr. Seuss' *Sneetches* or *The Lorax*, or Jerry Spinelli's *Wringer* or *Maniac McGee*, and show how it is developed through a character's experiences. Or they might identify how a character changes over time and then describe how the author develops that progression. Writing a literary essay is much more than writing for the sake of demonstrating knowledge or understanding. Such an experience pushes students into considering literature through fresh new lenses and creates rich material for discussion, thus enhancing the potential for appreciation and enjoyment.

## Persuasive Letters

From the time they are very young, children want to have a say about many aspects of their lives, and persuasive letters are a viable means for such expression. Students just moving into opinion writing will best feel the impact if they write for a personal audience, such as a letter to the teacher telling how they feel about a particular part of classroom life or a card for a family member expressing reasons they appreciate that person. As students develop their skill, they can also develop pieces that reflect new content they are learning in the classroom and write for a more broad audience such as the readership of a grade-level, school, or local newspaper; a letter to a community member; or a letter to an administrator in the school.

### Opportunity to Emphasize

#### Language Standard 3

- › Use a formal discourse/register that will persuade effectively without offending.
- › Choose precise words and phrases to make key points and keep audience attention.
- › Use “showing” words rather than “telling” words.
- › Choose words that will help the reader keep an open mind even if there is a tendency toward disagreement.

## Persuasive Essays

Children write persuasive essays to make a case for something they care about. Rather than being directed at a particular person or a particular audience (such as a teacher or the readers of a local newspaper), persuasive essays are written for anyone who may be interested in picking up the piece. Persuasive essays can be published as:

- a page for a class book focused on general issues deemed important by the students
- a page for a class book focused on a particular topic from the content-area curriculum (These books are fun to pass among grade-level classrooms because students across grade levels are typically studying the same content.)
- a blog that states an opinion and asks the audience (often classmates or grademates) to respond with agreement or disagreement

## Blogs

A blog is a public forum that students can use to express viewpoints and opinions. If your school doesn't have a system in place, but you have access to computers, try Edublogs (<http://edublogs.org>). This website offers a free system that is set up for educational purposes and includes easy-to-follow guidelines for implementing the entire blogging process. Your blogs can be set for complete privacy (such as allowing only the teacher to log in, or only the teacher and students, or only the teacher and other teachers in the school). Before getting started, check with your administrative office to learn about any existing tools or policies your school may have to guide the process.

In relation to Writing Anchor 1, students working in small groups can use a blogging system to do the following:

- Write an opinion statement. Post the statement, asking for written comments from other groups or from another class.
- Create a survey asking for classmates' opinions on a topic, an issue, or a text (two to four questions). Use the results from one of the questions to create an opinion statement (with reasons) that represents viewpoints from the class.
- Post an opinion on a topic or text. Other groups develop and post responses, giving reasons for their opinions. Each group then leads an oral discussion on the issue.

### Opportunity to Emphasize

#### Language Standard 3

- Use a formal discourse/register that will gently persuade without offending. It helps to try to show awareness of multiple perspectives and avoid implying that others have "bad" ideas or practices.
- Choose effective, precise words and phrases.

### Opportunity to Emphasize

#### Language Standard 3

- Use an informal but smart-sounding register that will persuade effectively without offending.
- Choose engaging, precise words and phrases to make key points and keep audience attention.
- Choose words that will help the reader keep an open mind even if there may be a tendency toward disagreement.



## Persuasive Video or Photo Documentaries

Photo and video documentaries are an engaging medium for expressing opinions about issues and events. If you have access to digital technology (camera or video) students can create multimedia opinion pieces. Consider the following:

- Work with students to generate opinion statements about life in the classroom, school, or schoolyard. For example, “Wet shoes should not be worn into the classroom,” “We don’t have many great books in our classroom,” or “Littering on or near the playground is a bad idea.” The task for this project is to use photographs with captions to *show the reasons* behind the opinions. Give student teams a camera and allow each team to take three to five photos. The group composes a written opinion piece with an introduction that states the opinion, reasons (supported by photos and connected with linking words), and a conclusion.
- Show students how to use video technology to record themselves making a case for something they feel is important. The group writes an engaging introduction with an opinion statement to read aloud on camera; each group member responds on camera with a concise reason for the opinion; and the group writes a closing statement to read aloud on camera.

### Opportunity to Emphasize

#### Language Standard 3

- › Use a formal discourse/register for the videotaped component of the presentation. Use language that shows you are considering multiple viewpoints.
- › Choose effective, precise words and phrases.

## Advertisements

Persuasion is all around us, especially in advertising. After examining advertising materials with your guidance (see Figure 1–19 for a starter set of questions to explore), students can write their own ads. Interesting advertising genres to explore with elementary students include websites or brochures advertising places to visit; advertisements for foods; and advertisements for toys, video games, and electronics. Desktop publishing programs can be used to publish the final pieces, or students can create their own designs on paper. If using desktop publishing, you may wish to set up the template for the students.

Figure 1–19

### Questions for Evaluating Advertisements

- What is the advertiser trying to sell?
- Describe what stands out most for you on this advertisement.
- Do you think this advertisement is aimed at children, adults, or both? How can you tell?
- What are the people pictured doing? Why do you suppose the advertisers chose this? What does the illustrator do to convince?
- Find a place where the product/place is described. What language is used to convince?
- Do you think the advertisers have done a good job of selling the product? Why or why not?

**CLICK** *to order now at*  
**Heinemann.com**

**ORDER BUNDLE**  
**at Heinemann.com**

**FORWARD** to  
**a Colleague**

